

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Office of the Archbishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In the midst of Lent, with its drama of sin and grace, of evil and good, I write about a threat to our freedom to practice our religion in our State.

Before the Illinois General Assembly there is a proposal (HB 2354, the “Reproductive Health and Access Act”) that would remove the right to conscientious objection to abortion and related procedures for all health care workers. Thirty years ago, we were told that abortion is a rare but necessary tragedy and that abortion providers should not be legally punished. Today we are being told that abortion is a human right and that those who qualify it in any manner or who will not provide it should be legally punished.

This proposed law will drive Catholic doctors and nurses from health care and will make it impossible for Catholic hospitals to continue to be places where life is always respected, where no one is deliberately killed. In our country, we recognize conscientious objection to war, even though defending one’s country is a noble and moral act. We recognize the conscientious objection of those doctors who will not cooperate in administering the death penalty, even for terrible crimes. Why do some Illinois legislators want to take away conscientious objection to abortion?

The enemies of human life and religious freedom in Illinois are well funded. Pressure on legislators is great and is increasing. I ask you to contact your Representative this week to express your dismay that the Illinois legislature, elected democratically, would debate a bill that removes freedom of conscientious decision-making for health care workers as a condition of their employment. If, as we are told, the State should not come between a doctor and a mother, then surely all can agree that the State should not come between a health care worker and God.

We have, unfortunately, had to get used to the fact that our laws no longer protect unborn human life; now we are to get used to the fact that our laws will no longer protect conscience. In 1844, Abraham Lincoln broke with his own party, the often anti-Catholic Whigs, and proposed: “Resolved, that the guarantee of the rights of conscience, as found in our Constitution, is most sacred and inviolable, and one that belongs no less to the Catholic, than to the Protestant; and that all attempts to abridge or interfere with these rights, either of Catholic or Protestant, directly or indirectly, have our decided disapprobation, and shall ever have our most effective opposition.” Illinois HB 2354 betrays the legacy of Lincoln in his home State.

This proposed law will rend the already fragile garment of our civic unity and further alienate many from our government. Catholics and all people of good will should work to ensure its defeat. I also ask you to thank those legislators who are courageously opposing HB 2354 and to pray for those who are supporting it. To contact your legislator, please go to www.ilga.gov, or call 312-368-1066. Thank you and God bless you.

Francis Cardinal George, OMI

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francis Cardinal George".

Archbishop of Chicago